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ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes principles of knowledge diffusion and provides a framework for applying new ideas or innovations, particularly in relation to rural community development. As new knowledge is created or old knowledge is found to have new applications, the art of spreading knowledge and managing innovation has become more crucial in both urban and rural communities. Change causes anxiety, and many innovations will encounter rejection. The diffusion of knowledge and of innovations in rural areas depends on the interpretation and communication by various stakeholders of the relative advantage of adopting an innovation. A critical component is effective marketing of an innovation or program to help clarify its advantage to the community. A second principle in knowledge diffusion suggests that the dissemination and use of innovations is constrained by the social, cultural, and organizational realities of the new context. Contextual forces often provide an explanation for resistance and for difficulties encountered in the dissemination of new knowledge, programs, or innovations. Equally important is the transactional nature of knowledge diffusion. Perceptions of the complexity, triability, and observability of an innovation will determine the rate of trial and adoption. This paper suggests that culture, norms, values, beliefs, and assumptions about life are major determinants of how individuals and communities view the world and change. The challenge of the innovator is to work within the social constructs of reality of those who will use and benefit from the new knowledge or program. Examples discuss introduction of innovations in human services delivery in rural areas. Contains 48 references. (LP)

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KNOWLEDGE DIFFUSION IN THE CONTEXT OF DEVELOPMENT IN RURAL AREAS

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INTRODUCTION

Rural Community Development has been defined in many ways. It is generally agreed, however, that it encompasses social, economic, political and cultural enhancement for the purpose of improving the quality of life of rural citizens and that it must occur within a framework of participation, respect for diversity and self-determination, whether the particular development project utilizes internal or external resources (Daley & Wong, 1994; Cary, 1973).

Development, when treated as a normative concept is usually synonymous with improvement and social transformation (Christenson, Fendley & Robinson, 1989). In this process, the role of community leadership in facilitating the dissemination of new ideas, the acceptance of new roles, the discovery of new solutions or the replication of old ones, whether introduced into the community by insiders or outsider, emerge as central. By definition, rural community development entails the introduction, dissemination and adoption of new ideas, technologies, programs or other changes by local people (Cawley, 1984; Huie, 1976), or the re-discovery of old ones for new and different purposes. As a process, rural community development is closely allied to innovation, knowledge diffusion and transfer of technology. However, as suggested by Tarde (1903), the diffusion of knowledge is not an easy process. Unfortunately, of hundreds of novel ideas or innovations introduced at any one time, very few will spread while the rest will remained unnoticed.

This paper will focus on the process of innovation in the context of rural community development. Knowledge diffusion theory and practice will be used to suggest basic steps that might be useful to the rural innovator. Can we identify basic principles that can be used in rural development when introducing a new idea, replicating an old one or simply spreading a concept, principle or practice which may have worked elsewhere? What can rural community leaders and professionals do to energize the process of replication and discovery of new knowledge in rural areas? In all spheres of life, but particularly in the human services, we cannot afford to discard "gems" that may have worked elsewhere simply because we are unable to translate them into helpful local practices. Yet, the energies of the innovator often go into finding the "gems" while the process of applying them, cultivating them and letting them take new roots goes unattended.

Even though seminal work on knowledge diffusion originated in the rural field (Rogers, 1983; Rogers & Shoemaker, 1971), rural innovators have often disregarded existing, predictable patterns of knowledge diffusion (Chatterjee & Ireys, 1979; Watson, 1983). Innovators have frequently been perceived as eccentrics or people with "hairbrained" ideas (Smale, 1993), whose processes, though at times successful, may not deserve systematic study and attention. Yet, particularly in the human services, where "one is dealing with human beings with deep and pressing needs, the disparaging of innovation is an immoral position" (Governors Center, 1991:4). This paper will analyze knowledge diffusion principles and suggest steps that can be replicated easily and can provide frameworks and blueprints for new developments in rural areas, not only in the human services but also in a variety of other fields.

THE PROBLEM OF CHANGE AND THE MANAGEMENT OF INNOVATIONS

Change has always been and will continue to be a certainty in rural areas. Broad societal trends ranging from the delivery of rural mail, the mechanization of agriculture, the viability of the family farm, the introduction of industry, from textiles to shoes and computers, the transformation of the one room school house, the advent of radio and television, the wax and wane in the use of rural midwives, or more broadly speaking, the appreciation or depreciation of rural life styles, have been the daily reality of many rural citizens. What is perhaps new is the speed at which changes are introduced in modern life, their scope and pervasiveness. Modern changes have deeply affected human relationships (Fitchen, 1991). In the human services, lack of resources have pressed professionals in all fields to search for new and creative ways of insuring that rural people receive the degree and quality of services they deserve. Citizens and professionals in rural communities have joined the search for new ideas, new knowledge or new programs that can alleviate their problems and satisfy their needs. Change and innovation have certainly become the order of the day.

Furthermore, as modern communication has rendered the whole world accessible, the search for the programmatic "jewels" which might prove useful in meeting the ever-increasing needs of the countryside has taken on international dimensions. In the U.S., for example, federal, state and local governments, voluntary agencies and for profit corporations are actively searching for new approaches in the human services, across national borders.1 It can safely be assumed that the same is true in other countries. In relation to social problems, Schor (1988) has suggested that the best way to combat helplessness is to identify innovations that help and encourage their diffusion. It has become apparent across the world that, as new knowledge is created or old knowledge is found to have new applications, the art of spreading knowledge and managing innovation has become more crucial in urban and rural communities (Smale & Tucson, 1992). We know, however, that changes cause anxiety; thus, it is highly probable that innovations will encounter rejection. As Alfred North Whitehead suggested, the art of progress, improvement, or, for that matter, the art of development is "to preserve order amid change and change amid order" (Whitehead, 1988/1933). The philosopher understood the fine complementarily of change and stability. Indubitably, as many community development veterans know, a good innovator must preserve some sense of order which can allay the anxieties of those who participate in the process.

DEFINITIONS AND BASIC THEMES

Before we proceed, a few definitions might be useful. The term innovation simply means something new; change implies something different from the established order or the common pattern. While many innovations are the direct consequence of new discoveries in science or technology, many are only the result of applying very old principles in relatively new ways or in new contexts. An innovation is in and of itself neither positive nor negative. An innovation only takes on positive or negative qualities as we pursue it, searching for solutions to an existing problem. Having confronted a problem which resisted former solutions, a change or innovation allows those involved in the process to explore alternative ways of solving it.

Among the better known work on knowledge diffusion and the transfer of innovations is that of Rogers (1983) and Rogers and Shoemaker (1971). Their work has given us a framework for synthesizing some of the characteristics of the innovations themselves and some of the highlights of the process of innovation which might be helpful in disseminating new ideas in rural areas. At a more abstract level, Dunn, Holzner and Zaltman (1985) have identified conceptual premises that explain the nature of knowledge use. Finally, based on the work of Rogers (1983), Dunn, Holzner and Zaltman (1985), and on research experience with projects of knowledge diffusion in rural areas, Martinez-Brawley (1993) suggested steps that could be followed to achieve more successful rates of knowledge diffusion and innovation.

Based on what we know about rural communities and rural development, this paper will focus on analyzing and illustrating how three selected characteristics or attributes of innovations dovetail with the more abstract principles of knowledge diffusion and with concrete steps suggested for the innovator. In turn, the following will be discussed:

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1. Knowledge interpretation—Relative advantage—Innovation marketing;
2. The systemic nature of knowledge use—Value compatibility— Aids or constraints in innovation diffusion;
3. The transactional nature of knowledge— Complexity, triability and observability—Networks and concept simplification.

Figure 1 summarily presents how the conceptual premises of the process of knowledge diffusion, the characteristics of the innovations themselves and the steps of the innovator run along parallel lines. While the characteristics of the innovations selected do not constitute an exhaustive list, they were chosen because they are extremely compatible with well established principles of rural development. Particularly in the rural human services, where economic or commercial motives often provide less encouragement in the adoption of innovations than in other areas, it is useful to study processes that can enhance the diffusion of improved ways of caring.

KNOWLEDGE INTERPRETATION — RELATIVE ADVANTAGE — INNOVATION MARKETING

Those who study the sociology of knowledge or the field of knowledge utilization report that knowledge is always interpretative. In other words, knowledge, once discovered, or innovations, once produced, do not speak for themselves. They must be interpreted and communicated by various stake holders before they will be utilized or translated into practical action (Dunn, Holzner & Zaltman, 1985; Lazarsfeld, 1975). Regardless of the nature of the new knowledge, interpretation is part of the utilization cycle.

However, is some knowledge more amenable to interpretation than other? Are some innovations more likely to be caught in the whirlwind of the utilization cycle than others? In the early development of innovation theory, researchers believed the objective status of an innovation (its intrinsic worth or merit) on the one hand, and the personal characteristics of the potential adopters (their socio-economic or educational status, their identification with traditions) on the other, were major factors in the rate of adoption. Thus, scholars often arrived at sweeping and perhaps mistaken conclusions about a particular group's or region's propensity to use new knowledge or adopt new technologies. A perfect example of this was the over-generalization that rural areas were absolutely reluctant to accept innovation and change, a premise that has been shown to be not always correct.

Rogers'(1983) studies placed much greater significance on socio-psychological dimensions, that is, the perceived characteristics of the new idea or practice rather than on its objective status. Ostlund (1974) corroborated that Roger's socio-psychological attributes of innovations were good predictors of adoption. Pandey and Yadama (1992) further suggested that relative advantage, compatibility and complexity were probably the strongest. Russell and Nicholson (1981) stressed the importance of participatory decision making.

Relative advantage refers strictly to the way in which an innovation is perceived. If a new idea or innovation is perceived as being better than the idea it replaces, it will probably be tried out and even adopted. The strength of the objective evidence that it works does not seem to make a fundamental difference at the start, but the degree to which a person or community feels rewarded or disadvantaged in adopting an innovation or new technology does.

Cost of the new idea is often a very important factor in the perception of advantage or disadvantage. Changes, which might be advantageous in urban areas, for example, are often disregarded in rural areas because of cost factors. It was recently suggested that the cost of implementing new EEC piped water regulations in the Highlands of Scotland was so high, that the Chairman of the Highland Forum openly suggested that providing bottled water for drinking would be cheaper (Bryden, 1991). Clearly, such a change proposal would not be high on relative advantage even if it had been viewed by the leadership as an improvement.

Before perceived advantage among feasible alternatives can be discerned, there are probably two pre-requisites. The first is knowledge of the innovation and the second is a degree of dissatisfaction with the existing state of affairs. Dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs is fairly spontaneous. We know, however, that, knowledge is interpretative; consequently ideas do not transfer by themselves; committed innovators and product champions of the new knowledge need to have not only knowledge of the innovation but must perceive one or more of its relative advantages, because the proponent of an innovation must carry out a variety of marketing tasks.

In marketing an innovation, the proponent of the new knowledge, technology or program will need to first identify the perceptions and attitudes toward the innovation and then proceed to clarify its relative advantage. In the human services, the innovator is likely to be dealing with changes that represent a social/communal cost and but render mainly a non-financial or service benefit for the individual or community (Agarwal,1983). Furthermore, the decision of whether or not to consider the innovation is often in the hands of those who may not use it, and thus, may not see the direct advantage of the new idea. Consequently, communal consensus is likely to be an important marketing factor. For example, the relative advantage of opening a new day care facility for children in a small town may not be apparent to an older or well established community leadership. On the other hand, the consensus and cohesiveness of the young might convince the leadership of the relative advantage of having the younger constituents on their side; their support might be needed to put into effect other efforts that might benefit, more directly, the leadership. Even the objective evidence of better cared for children, or of reduced social costs in the long run, may not necessarily be the best marketing approach. The better technique might be to market the idea first among the potential adopters and let their consensus and cohesiveness play a role with the leadership. Indirectly, the leadership may recognize a relative advantage for themselves.

In a recent innovation project in rural Pennsylvania, the idea of "integrated services", that is, single agencies that provide a variety of personal social services in the rural counties, was the object of a knowledge diffusion and innovation project (Martinez-Brawley & Delevan, 1992). Objective evidence that showed integrated agencies as advantageous was collected but so was evidence that showed that integrated agencies were not any more effective or efficient. Administrators and providers who had both positive and negative experiences with integrated agencies debated the concept. In the end, those who moved to apply the new idea in their counties were those who had begun by being more favorably disposed toward it because they believed the cost savings and improved access factors were an obvious relative advantage. Additionally, those who perceived the new model to have real financial and political advantages became the champions. Increased knowledge and familiarity with the new idea helped solidify positive perceptions and move marginal ones in a positive direction rather than change those who were vehemently opposed to the concept. In the human services, where few innovations or new ideas can be shown, with certainty, to be improvements over the ones they replace, perceptions of relative advantage are particularly important.

Finally, a very important marketing approach to an innovation in rural communities is the contagion effect. Capitalizing on the very close social networks of most rural places, whether in reference to individuals, to organizations or to communities, the rural innovator needs to identify a few enthusiasts for the given innovation and make sure that the new idea is publicly displayed, talked about, discussed and demonstrated. Even intense debate in reputable public forum can create a positive contagion effect, provided the debate does not obscure all the potential political or other relative advantages. Again, drawing on the example of a recent Pennsylvania project on the transfer of "community oriented and patch based services", a human service delivery model from the U.K. (Martinez-Brawley with Delevan, 1993)2, the contagion effect became apparent. When one county director, who was a product champion, began to receive substantial press coverage (both, positive and negative) for his innovating interests, many other directors began to discuss the perceived relative advantage of this coverage for their own organizations. This prompted a wave of

interest and experimentation with the new idea and resulted in the eventual diffusion of the innovation to two other rural counties.

THE SYSTEMIC NATURE OF KNOWLEDGE USE—VALUE COMPATIBILITY—AIDS OR CONSTRAINTS IN INNOVATION DIFFUSION

A second principle in knowledge diffusion suggests that knowledge use is systemic, that is, the dissemination and use of innovations or discoveries is constrained by the social, cultural and organizational realities of the new context. This is an important principle which applies to rural and urban areas alike. As already mentioned, rural areas have been said to be particularly resistant to the adoption of new ideas. Traditional values and mores, even in highly industrial societies have been cited as causes. Yet, when one examines innovation from the perspective of relative advantage, other explanations emerge for rural areas. In the U.S., for example, educational levels and local authority's investment in rural education have remained low in many rural communities. Rural schools are often unable or unenthusiastic, it would seem, to invest in new educational approaches or technology. Johnson (1991) has argued that two important reasons for this under-investment is the declining number of jobs in rural communities. Lack of jobs leads to perceived (and real) low return on educational investments for individuals and to disincentives for rural schools, inasmuch as they do not reap the benefits of their investments because of rural out-migration. (Rural Sociological Society, 1993). Contextual forces often provide, if not a justification, at least an explanation for resistance and for difficulties encountered in the dissemination of new knowledge, programs or innovations.

Furthermore, because knowledge use is systemic, the value compatibility (Rogers, 1983) between the innovation or program and the specific context, needs to be determined carefully. A survey of the literature on knowledge use found that "researchers and users belong to separate communities" (Beyer & Trice, 1982:608). Value and cultural discrepancies between the developers of knowledge or technologies and the users of the product have often been profound. For example, testing the rate of adoption of new wood stoves in rural Nepal, Pandey and Yadama (1992) ascertained that cultural compatibility between the technology, however simple, and the user was the major factor in determining stove use. Nepalese women found that the new stoves were a problem in preparing some standard dishes and were also incompatible with their pots and utensils. Obviously, in designing the new stoves in a community development project, customization of the technology to the users' needs and preferences should be a central concern.

The situation is not dissimilar in the human services; in fact, it can be more complex. Human service innovations, even administrative ones, just like stoves, result in changes in the action patterns of the users. Unlike innovations such as household insulation, which, once installed, require no alteration in the homeowner's action patterns to achieve economies (Darley & Beniger, 1981), human service innovations require a great many changes in the action patterns of the user. Changing the model of provision of rural services from a variety of specialized agencies to an integrated one based in a school, for example, would require modifications in the action patterns of many people. The daily patterns of the "users", whether defined as the social workers themselves or the clients/consumers, would undergo change. Innovators and product champions of new knowledge need to view the process of knowledge dissemination as a collaboration or transaction between many parties. They need to assess the fit between the new idea and the many parties involved in the new context.

In contouring the innovation or new knowledge to the local situation, objective evidence that the innovation has been tried and works, preferably in similar surroundings, becomes more useful. The more locally credible the evidence, the more likely that the user will be able to identify with the new idea. In rural areas, a program that has been shown to work in an urban area will be far less attractive to the user than one which can boast of broad rural application. This will be because of both, perceived relative advantage and compatibility.

Issues related to the naming of the innovation are discussed in the context of making it compatible with the new surroundings. While innovators may believe that the names they give to their projects reflect the essence of those projects, localites (Rogers, 1983) must develop names which fit their linguistic patterns and meanings and reflect positive rather than negative local experiences. In adjusting the innovation to fit the local system the innovator is following principles of community development that stress local decision-making.

In rural areas, one way of testing compatibility is to bring the discoverers or inventors, the product champions and the users into close contact. This can be through face-to-face interaction, workshops and seminars that bring together the various parties involved in the diffusion and encourage their exchanges. This process is not limited to testing compatibility but extends, as we shall see, to minimizing the complexity and enhancing the triability of an idea. Naturally, the process of exchange cannot be limited to the early stages of adoption; it must be nurtured so that it does not end with the assessment of compatibility but continues to the development of truly autochthonous or local solutions.

The example of two recent Pennsylvania projects come to mind. A 1991 project (Martinez-Brawley & Delevan, 1991)sponsored by the Center for Rural Pennsylvania, a legislative agency of the Pennsylvania General Assembly permitted two researchers to gather, in four intensive workshops through the course of one year, the administrative and political leadership of about twenty rural counties to explore the idea of more integrated human service agencies that would serve the needs of those counties. Through interviews, discussions and focus group techniques, the leadership explored the possible innovation, adapted it to their own contexts, modified it, re-named and explored the possibilities of its diffusion. What began as the consideration of a model of "integrated human services agencies" ended up as the diffusion of a continuum of local possibilities, from the very integrated to the specialized. The originally proposed name for the project was changed to reflect the thrust of the emerging consensus3.

While the original idea had been transformed, the doors of dialogue and exploration remained open for yet a second project which introduced, in similar fashion, the principles of community oriented social work from the U.K. to rural Pennsylvania. Of the original twenty counties, ten were ready to make an investment in the second project and four actually operationalized innovations, which took on different characteristics in rural Pennsylvania than had been the case in rural Britain (Martinez-Brawley, 1993). Any new knowledge applied or disseminated to a new context undergoes transformation; the final product is never the same, for new situations aid in the discovery of new relationships, the generation of newer ideas, and the transformation and re-invention of the old ones into programs that work for local users (Martinez-Brawley, 1993).

One final issue in relation to the systemic nature of knowledge diffusion must be considered. Particularly in the human services, innovations are not as structured or concrete as they are in technical fields. Human service innovations tend to be, in Gruber's (1977) words, "messy solutions to messy problems" (p.22). Not only will they be more difficult to maintain (because communicability and evaluation are more difficult for messy innovations), but also, they will have very pervasive systemic consequences. Innovators must be alert to assessing consequences in other parts of the system or even in other systems they never intended to impact. In rural areas, where the inter-connectedness of systems is significant, the intended and unintended consequences of new knowledge must be carefully monitored. For example, in certain rural Pennsylvania counties, when introducing decentralized, community oriented services through the use of patchworkers4, the question remained as to the additional demand for services the new technology would generate. Most rural county administrators anticipated that the presence of the patchworker would result in additional requests not just for social services but probably for educational, sanitary, medical and other services. The resolution of one problem often generates awareness of other problems.

THE TRANSACTIONAL NATURE OF KNOWLEDGE—COMPLEXITY, TRIABILITY AND OBSERVABILITY—NETWORKS AND CONCEPT SIMPLIFICATION

Knowledge dissemination is transactional. Knowledge dissemination is not a one dimensional process in which discrete pieces of information are moved from one party to another. In fact, neither knowledge, nor technology nor innovations can be said to be truly exchanged, marketed or transferred. "On the contrary, knowledge is in fact transacted among parties engaged in symbolic or communicate acts of negotiating the adequacy, relevance and cogency of knowledge claims" (Dunn, Holzner & Zaltman, 1985 2832-2833).

Knowledge can be transacted in a variety of ways. In rural areas, some important ways are networks, whether cosmopolite or localite (Rogers, 1983, p.200), professional or acquaintanceship. Networks form channels of communication through which innovations spread and through which the contagion effect already described is enhanced. Cosmopolite or professional channels (Rogers, 1983, P.200) are important at the conception and generation stages of new ideas or projects. Localite or acquaintanceship networks of communication play a key role in spreading awareness of new ideas and managing attitudes about them. In fact, the process of innovation becomes collaborative as all the parties and networks engage in understanding the new concepts. The collaborative aspects of knowledge diffusion dovetail with the process of community development and with the development of appropriate technology (Schumacher, 1973; Fear, Gamm & Fisher,1989). Innovators and product champions must engage in an exchange of ideas with the likely adopters. Effective exchange, suggested Gruber (1977) is started at the outset, not developed after the fact.

Complexity refers to the perceived difficult of the innovation. Triability refers to the degree to which an innovation can be tested either for effectiveness, cost, or even other dimensions such as comfort, accessibility, etc. Finally, observability refers to the potential outcomes. Will others be able see or experience the change? Will the situation change for the better in observable ways? Rogers (1983) emphasized that these dimensions have a psychological effect on the trial of innovations. How complex, triable and observable an innovation is perceived to be will determine the rate of trial and adoption. Clearly, the easier an innovation is to understand, the more likely it is that it might at least be tried.

As was mentioned before, interaction and proximity of all the parties involved in the knowledge diffusion process serve to test, not only compatibility with values and culture, but also to reduce the level of complexity and enhance the triability of an innovation. Schor (1988) has warned that in attempting to transfer an idea or a program, the innovator must focus on the basic concept, not the detail. Awareness of the basic principles of an innovation have been translated into high rates of triability. Even in villages where stereotypes of tradition-bound or conservative inhabitants were prevalent, increasing awareness of the new knowledge brought the stereotypes into question (Gartrell & Gartrell, 1979). This does not mean that awareness alone will result in triability; what seems to be the case is that simple, understandable and easily triable innovations, stand a better chance of being used by locals. Details are usually filed away or discarded by potential innovators. They become a kind of "noise pollution" in transferability. In human service agencies, where bureaucratic details tend to quickly overtake program management, it is only the essence of the program that can be considered transferrable. If simply articulated, a good idea will take on various shapes, as it is applied in various contexts.

An example of a key idea, succinct in its origin to be cited here is that of the use of promotores (or promoters) in many contexts and in many fields in the rural U.S., particularly, but not exclusively, where Hispanics constitute a large percentage of the population. The concept of the promotor was originally used in Spain. Promotores socio-culturales helped to engage local rural groups in the re-claiming their own traditions and lore immediately following the Franco regime (Martinez-Brawley, 1991; Brawley & Martinez-Brawley, 1990). The concept was also used in Latin theories of Freire (1972). More recently, the concept of promotores has been transferred to the health field and reflects the work of health para-professionals who attempt to introduce improved health practices by drawing on local and traditional forms of healing. The promotores, in that sense, are no longer limited to the socio-cultural field. The basic idea has been disseminated to other fields and to broader regions. Each field and each region has adapted the concept to its own context. No details were ever needed for the adaptation of the key concept.

A recent project partnership between the University of Arizona College of Pharmacy and Arizona State University School of Social Work, entitled Nuestra Communidad, Nuestra Salud defines promotores as "lay health promoters who share with the client a social, environmental and ethnic subculture as well as the client's verbal and non-verbal language" (Slack, 1994). In this project, the promotores are viewed not only as preservers of local culture, as had been the case in the Spanish original, but as agents in the transfer of health practices and technologies. Naturally, not all concepts have such a commendable degree of simplicity inherent in them.

The concept of case managers is another example. One of the reasons for the variety of definitions of a case managers is that a basic concept, which had its roots in the early tasks performed by caseworkers, has been transferred, negotiated and re-interpreted in many local settings. While situations such as this add complexity to the human service vocabulary, they also create flexibility in knowledge application. In the end, the professional finds himself or herself enmeshed in a much broader web of application than the inventor may have envisioned. Additionally, these modifications and re-inventions of the knowledge have proven essential to maintaining the momentum for change. For example, in transferring patch models from the U.K. to counties in rural Pennsylvania, what finally emerged in one county was not a remote, rural, generalist patch, but a patch in a minority neighborhood of the biggest county town, operationalized through one of the specialized county agencies (T. L. Barley, Personal Communication, Dec 1st, 1993). (Parenthetically, questions about the tendency of social agencies to base the trial of innovations in minority communities could be raised here, for positive and negative reasons, but that needs to be the focus of a different debate.)

If a concept is simple, it will be used and diffused. But, it will also be changed, re-interpreted and can quite possibly become unrecognizable. As Rein and Schon (1977) suggested, we may do something new and, when done, finally ask, "how did we get here?". The practitioner who cannot live with this is denying the most basic practice assumptions in the field of knowledge use. The process of re-invention makes it essential for the innovator or user of expert knowledge "to identify real concerns and forestall narrow, self-serving ones" (Boggs, 1992).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This paper has reviewed the process of knowledge diffusion in relation to selected characteristics of new ideas or innovations. Steps an innovator can take in enhancing positive outcomes have been suggested. Parallelisms were drawn between the processes of knowledge diffusion and innovation and that of community development; particular rural examples were discussed.

Implied in the discussion was the fact that culture, that is norms, values, beliefs, assumptions about life, linguistic habits, etc., is a major determinant of how individuals and communities view the world and approach the realities of daily living. The strength of the daily reality, whether of rural people in a particular part of the world, or of professionals in a given social service agency, is often underestimated. Yet, new ideas or innovations disrupt that reality. New ideas can often go counter to or question individuals' basic social constructs, while attempting to modify their habitual actions (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). The biggest threat to the dissemination of new knowledge or the success of innovations in development is the resistance inherent in local social constructs and habitual actions.

Yet, as Gouldner writes, the social construction of individual and collective realities is not static but forever changing (Gouldner,

1976). Only a dynamic interpretation of social reality can permit the work of the innovator. Culture and habitual actions can be viewed as motivating rather than binding.

The challenge of the innovator is to identify the constructs through which the individuals or communities with which he/she works interpret their world. These social constructs must be understood fully in order to be influenced. The most basic and yet most fundamental task of the knowledge builder, transmitter or innovator is to work with the social construction of reality of those who will use, receive and presumably benefit from the new knowledge or program.

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[1] Foundation initiatives related to innovation have been sponsored among others by the Aspen Institute (1993), the Synergos Institute (1992), the Mega Cities Project (1992). In 1989, the largest 475 American foundations awarded $ 563 million for research and demonstration. The Exxon Foundation IMPACT program was created to promote wider utilization of educational innovations (Backer & Shaperman, 1993).

The federal government has funded knowledge diffusion prospects through the National Cancer Institute, the National Institutes of Health, the National Institute on Drug Abuse, the Maternal and Child Health Bureau, the Children National Demonstration Program, the Administration of Children and families and others (Backer & Shaperman, 1993; Backer, 1991).

- Community oriented social work or community social work is an approach to social work that uses local networks, teamwork by professionals, integrated service delivery systems, and user involvement. A basic definition appears in the Barclay Report (1982). A patch is a sub-organizational unit in a local authority (county) social services department. It is limited geographically and by population. The idea is to based in the patch a social worker who is conversant with the local community and relate in non-bureaucratic ways to local needs.
- The originally proposed name for the project was "Human Service Delivery in Rural Counties in Pennsylvania. Barriers to Integration. Implications for Legislative Action". The final name agreed to by all participants was "Considerations on Integrative Structures, Conditions and Alternative Models for County Human Service Delivery". The final title reflected not only the reluctance to imply sweeping changes but also the broader continuum of possibilities participants needed to be able to re-invent concepts.
- Social workers who deliver generalist services to delineated geographic regions. Patches are usually based on population but also take into account accessibility to the corners of the patch by the caseworker, familiarity of the worker with the patch culture, etc. (Martinez-Brawley, 1984). The term originated in the U.K. and was part of the technology to be transferred to Pennsylvania rural counties (Martinez-Brawley with Delevan, 1993).